

Ancient Material Worlds

— History you can touch

Assignment #4: Excavation

“Nobody ever learned how to dig properly from a book (including this one)” (Anglo-American Project in Pompeii Student Handbook, 1998. Quote by Thomas, D.H. 1989. Archaeology (Fort Worth, TX), p. 203.) This was the opening quotation to the excavation section of the handbook for my first fieldwork experience in archaeology. The boldness of this quote comes from the confidence of knowing that the student holding that handbook will not have to learn archaeology from it alone. Instead, they will stand in physical confrontation with the place and the artifacts of the ancient world while getting hands-on practice in the ways archaeologists study spaces and things. The elemental truth of the statement remains today and there is still no substitute for attending a field school and getting your hands dirty. Today, however, we have far more resources than were available in 1998 and the experience of excavation can be more easily distilled into its constituent intellectual parts. Moreover, while we cannot replicate the use of all of one’s senses in the field, we can begin to cultivate the most important sense: archaeological vision. We will learn to see the soil (and much else) like an archaeologist. That is what the two parts of this assignment will attempt to do.

Part I:

To begin to understand the (multitude of) realities of the excavation method, we will start by examining a traditional example from the so-called, East Field at Isthmia, Greece. Each student individually will read the trench notebook from a trench excavated between 1970 and 1972 at the Panhellenic sanctuary site of [Isthmia](#), in Greece. Using [this form](#), students will deconstruct the trenches, the recording method, and research priorities of the archaeologists working 40 years ago. Complete [the form](#)

and be prepared to discuss your observations on April 10th. Here are the student assignments, links to notebooks below:

- [1970-RB-SC-I](#)
- [1971-EF71-IX-I](#)
- [1971-JDC-II](#)
- [1971-JWP-I](#)
- [1972-EM-KK](#)

Student	Notebook
T	1970-RB-SC-I
T	
B	1971-EF71-IX-I
P	
L	1971-JDC-II
F	
P	1971-JWP-I
J	
M	1972-EM-KK
A	
C	1970-RB-SC-I
F	
K	1971-JDC-II
H	
T	

Part II:

Using two primary resources, groups of students will work together to deconstruct one week each of a five week long excavation. Those resources are:

- i. A database of the records for each unit of soil found or ancient activity recognized (called Stratigraphic Units). Included in this database is a gallery containing hundreds of digital images of the trench. We'll use this together in class.
- ii. The daily journal kept by the archaeologist supervising the excavation.

Instructions and questions are as follows:

- i. Download the [Trench Notebook](#) (2) and read your assigned week of excavation carefully. Use the dynamic [database of SUs](#) or the [complete SU set as pdf](#) (1) to get a better understanding of each unit excavated ([login credentials on Moodle](#)). Peruse the Trench Images (1) to help you visualize what you're reading.
- ii. Complete the questions in the forms below for each of the five days of your assigned week: [Day 1](#), [Day 2](#), [Day 3](#), [Day 4](#), or [Day 5](#).
 - Week 1: (6/27/11 – 7/1/11) – T, T, B.
 - Week 2: (7/4/11 – 7/8/11) – P, L, F.
 - Week 3: (7/11/11 – 7/15/11) – P, J, M.
 - Week 4: (7/18/11 – 7/22/11) – A, C, F.
 - Week 5: (7/25/11 – 7/29/11) – K, H, T.

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Isthmia Excavations

*** So that you can most easily write and re-read your answers, ensure that they are delivered and not lost by the internet, and be able to access these answers again later in the assignment, it is required that you write your answers in an offline program (MS Word, Pages, notepad, etc.) and then paste the responses into the question form. Save these offline documents with the rest of your files for the course. ***

* Required

Student Name(s) *

Your answer

Trench notebook read *

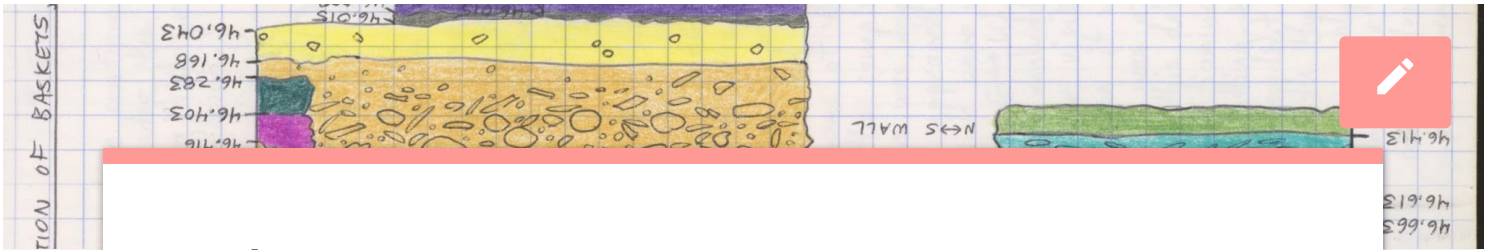
Your answer

NEXT

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Isthmia Excavations

* Required

Trench information and recording system

How many trenches are recorded in this notebook? *

Your answer

What are their dimensions? Include length, width and approximate depth. *

note: you'll have to figure depth from beginning and ending elevations.

Your answer

What is a Basket? *

Your answer

What is a Box? *

Your answer

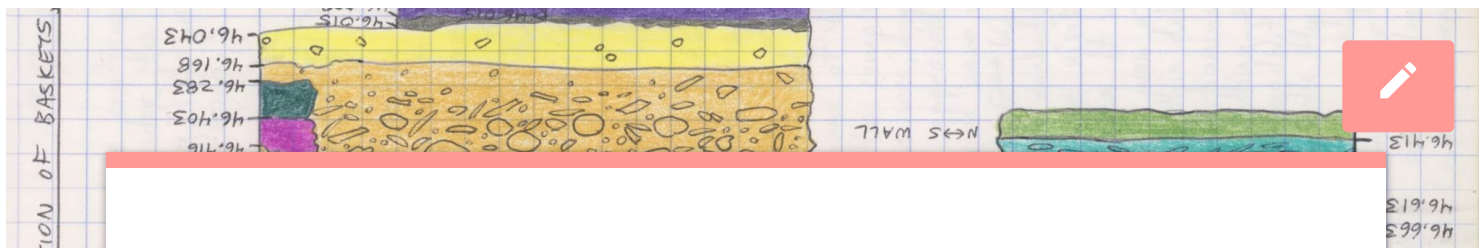
How are artifacts and features of the trench drawn? *

Your answer

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Isthmia Excavations

* Required

Impressions of Isthmia

What are your general impressions of the Isthmia excavations?
What do the excavators find to be most important? What to they leave out? *

(a paragraph or more is expected)

Your answer

What is the most interesting object or feature found? Why did you find it interesting? *

Your answer

What is the most confusing thing you encountered? How would you resolve this confusion? *

Your answer

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Excavation Assignment, Day 1.

*** So that you can most easily write and re-read your answers, ensure that they are delivered and not lost by the internet, and be able to access these answers again later in the assignment, it is required that you write your answers in an offline program (MS Word, Pages, notepad, etc.) and then paste the responses into the question form. Save these offline documents with the rest of your files for the course. ***

* Required

Student Name *

Your answer

Date *

This is the day in 2009 that you are reading about (e.g., Week 1, Day 1 is 6/29/2009)

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

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Excavation Assignment, Day 1.

* Required

Stratigraphic Unit (SU) Information

How many total SUs are being examined on this day? *

Your answer

List each SU number and then give a one sentence description of each. *

For example: "SU 27: A dark gray fill against the northern terrace wall". Add the next SU and description below the first. Repeat.

Your answer

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Excavation Assignment, Day 1.

* Required

Finds Information

List what the excavators found that day, with short descriptions as necessary. *

Your answer

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Excavation Assignment, Day 1.

* Required

Summary

Enter a brief, three sentence summary of what happened today *

Your answer

What was interesting about today in the trench? *

Your answer

What was confusing about today in the trench? *

Your answer

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